

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 00792 170942Z

15

ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04

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PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05 TRSE-00 OMB-01

AGR-05 EA-06 DOTE-00 FMC-01 CG-00 COA-01 DLOS-03 OC-05

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6360

INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

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E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, IN

SUBJECT: DEFENSE OF INDIA RULES INVOKED AGAINST PORT
STRIKE

REF: NEW DELHI 0683

1. APPROXIMATELY 200,000 PORT AND DOCK WORKERS IN INDIA'S
EIGHT MAJOR PORTS BEGAN AN INDEFINITE STRIKE JANUARY 16
FOLLOWING BREAKDOWN IN TALKS BETWEEN UNION LEADERS AND GOI
OFFICIALS ON JANUARY 15 (REFTEL). ACCORDING TO A SOURCE IN
THE MINISTRY OF SHIPPING AND TRANSPORT, THE STRIKE WAS TOTAL
IN ALL EIGHT PORTS. BY AFTERNOON JANUARY 16 GOI DECLARED
THE STRIKE ILLEGAL UNDER DEFENSE OF INDIAN RULES AND ORDERED
WORKERS TO RETURN TO THEIR JOBS. A SENIOR MINISTRY OF LABOR
OFFICIAL HAS TOLD US THAT IT IS NOT CERTAIN THAT THE BACK-TO-
WORK ORDER WILL BE OBEYED AND THAT SOME STRIKERS MAY HAVE TO
BE ARRESTED. HOWEVER, HE DID NOT ANTICIPATE THAT GOI WOULD
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PAGE 02 NEW DE 00792 170942Z

BECOME INVOLVED IN THE SAME KIND OF CONFRONTATION WITH THE

DOCK WORKERS THAT IT HAD WITH THE RAIL WORKERS IN THEIR STRIKE LAST MAY, WHEN HARSH MEASURES WERE INVOKED AGAINST THE STRIKERS FROM THE OUTSET OF THE STRIKE. THE LEADERSHIP OF THE DOCK WORKERS UNIONS IS BELIEVED TO BE MORE RESPONSIBLE AND LESS POLITICALLY MOTIVATED. THE OFFICIAL ADDED THAT THE LABOR MINISTRY DID NOT ANTICIPATE A STRIKE BELIEVING THAT THE ELEVENTH HOUR NEGOTIATIONS ON JANUARY 15 WOULD BE SUCCESSFUL (REFTEL). HE PLACED RESPONSIBILITY ON THE SHIPPING AND TRANSPORT MINISTRY FOR ITS INEPTITUDE IN HANDLING THE NEGOTIATIONS.

2. AS OF THE MORNING OF JANUARY 17 THERE IS NO INFORMATION AS TO THE EXTENT OF COMPLIANCE BY DOCK WORKERS WITH THE RETURN-TO-WORK ORDER. PRESIDENT OF THE ALL-INDIA PORT AND DOCK WORKERS' FEDERATION, S. R. KULKARNI, WHOSE INDEPENDENT ORGANIZATION IS LEADING THE STRIKE, TOLD THE PRESS THAT THE INVOCATION OF THE DEFENSE OF INDIA RULES WOULD WORSEN THE SITUATION. K. A. KHAN, SECRETARY OF THE TRANSPORT AND DOCK WORKERS UNION OF BOMBAY, AND A CLOSE ASSOCIATE OF KULKARNI, HAS PUBLICLY STATED THE STRIKE WILL CONTINUE DESPITE THE GOI ORDER.

3. GIVEN THE UNCERTAIN FUTURE OF THIS STRIKE, IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO PINPOINT ITS ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS AT THIS TIME. IF THE STRIKE CONTINUES FOR ANY EXTENDED PERIOD, IT WILL SERIOUSLY AFFECT FOOD SUPPLIES, INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION, AND EXPORT EARNINGS.

4. ACCORDING TO A PRESS SURVEY OF FIVE OF THE PORTS, OVER 150 SHIPS ARE CAUGHT IN THE STRIKE, INCLUDING VESSELS CARRYING FOOD AND FERTILIZER. DELAYS IN FERTILIZERS WILL NOT SERIOUSLY AFFECT THE SPRING (RABI) CROP, SINCE THE SOWING IS ALREADY COMPLETED. ON IMMEDIATE DANGER TO INDIA'S EXPORT EARNINGS WOULD ARISE FROM DELAYS IN SHIPMENTS OF IRON ORE. PREVIOUS DELAYS PROMPTED THE JAPANESE TO WARN THAT THEY WILL REDUCE ORE IMPORTS IF THERE ARE FURTHER DELAYS.
SCHNEIDER

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